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## Porfiriato

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*Porfiriato*

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Dictators have been a part of the history of the world for as long as anyone can remember. A dictator is defined as someone who rules unconstrained by law and in some cases behaves like a tyrant. Adolph Hitler is a well known dictator of Germany during the mid nineteen hundredths, who along with Joseph Stalin dictator of Russia took control of their perspective country using unconstrained power and became tyrants in history. But, the list of dictators who were devoured by power and festered into tyrants continues beyond these two individuals. One dictator that ruled for decades, before being stopped and exiled, was Porfirio Diaz. In this particular situation, Diaz filled the role as a tyrant and the victim of his actions was the nation of Mexico. Porfirio Diaz seized control of the presidency of Mexico in 1876, and established a regime under his control for over three decades. I will focus my paper on the fact that Diaz, like many dictators before him and after, was not scared to use crooked politics, violence, and intimidation as tactics to ensure his supremacy and to implement his program of modernization; and even though some outcomes of his rule were positive, the majority had negative impacts on society as a whole during the time of the Porfiriato. As a result of his actions very few benefited from his presidential maneuvers, the majority of those that benefited were fellow peers and foreign individuals or corporations. <sup>1</sup>The trickle down of wealth came to a hastily stop before ever arriving

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<sup>1</sup> Hamill Hugh M. Cuadillos Dictators in Spanish America. University of Oklahoma Press; Norman and London, 1992, p177.

down to the middle and peasantry classes. The benefits that the country received were minimal as well and mostly affected urban areas, excluding rural communities.

Porfirio Diaz was born on September 16, 1830 in Oaxaca, located in the mountains of Southern Mexico. His christened name was Jose de la Cruz Porfirio Diaz and came from mostly indigenous descent with a trace of Spanish blood. His family owned a small inn and his father worked as a blacksmith. He attended law school and soon afterwards enlisted in the Mexican American War. He served under Benito Juarez during the French occupation, but, unfortunately for us the war ended before he had a chance to see any action, or at least get killed.

Diaz gained prominence by supporting Benito Juárez and the liberals in the War of the Reform and against French. As he gained more influence among leadership in the Mexican government, he decided to run against Juarez in the presidential elections of 1871, only to lose, he was upset with the finale and rose up against Juarez, the uprising was not suppressed until after the inauguration of Sebastián Lerdo de Tejada. He didn't give up here; he tried once again in the presidential election of 1876, but was defeated again by Lerdo. Not accepting the outcome Diaz charged fraud and gathered enough support to lead a revolt against the government, which gained him the presidency. His power was to go undisputed, until 1911.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup>Hamill Hugh M. Cuadillos Dictators in Spanish America. p152.

their communal lands and the remaining was destined to become indentured servants. One of the major problems of the movement, along with Porfirio regime was that they were corrupt. If the people of Mexico refused to follow the policies, they could face several harsh penalties ranging from harassment to death. Although some policies of the Diaz regime were successful, only a small group of people benefited from them.

Diaz's strategy of modernization was export-oriented, which enable growth and integration into the world economy. The Díaz regime encouraged manufacturing through export incentives, high protective tariffs on foreign manufactured products, low transportation costs, and abolition of the transactions tax on business. The number of industrial enterprises grew rapidly, and the volume of manufactured goods doubled during the Porfiraio. Another characteristic was the exploitation of the country's natural resources, using cheap domestic labor and foreign capital and technology for export production. The labor conditions of this time have been described as the, blood of the people the oiled the great economic machine Mexico was becoming.<sup>3</sup> Thus, the conditions in Mexico became ideal for foreign investors; foreign capital fueled dynamic growth, and an expanding transportation network promoted other export sectors like agriculture, manufacturing, and mining. Railroads allowed the use of new land in the north for cotton cultivation and enabled Mexico to double its cotton production. This enhancement of transportation systems, like the railroads, contributed to the revival of

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<sup>3</sup> Turner, John K. Barbarous Mexico University of Texas Press, Austin and London p 104.

This period has come to be known as the time of the "Porfiriato," it became a 35-year regime that did see economic growth of material prosperity in Mexico. Some of the impacts on the nation during this time had positive, but overall negative effects on the country. Foreign investment into Mexico increased dramatically bringing more roads and railways, increased mining, and for an instance stabilized the currency. He did this by attracting foreign investment, which he sold oil and mining rights too. Huge developing projects were undertaken during this time which also improved public transportation system. Material prosperity grew while he was in the presidency.

Diaz was influenced by the belief in the triumph of science and in the scientific method. The idea of positivism in Mexico appeared during this time, the movement began with the gathering of several intellectuals to form a group; these individuals were called the, "cientificos." Jose Ives Limantour, was the leader of the Científicos, who were hired to create policies that all Mexicans were, expected to follow. These policies were known as policy of conciliation, described as *pan o palo*, which translates into bread or the club. Basically meaning you do what I want or get hurt. These policies, which were approved by Diaz, stressed the importance of rationalism and the scientific method to solve problems in Mexico; which included financial and education issues. Mexico for a moment became a land of peace and prosperity. During this time Díaz sold three quarters of the nation's mineral resources to foreign interests and apportioned millions of acres among friendly land owners. The peasants lost more of

mining because they provided the only feasible means of transporting huge amounts of material. Legal reforms in 1884 lowered taxes on mining and allowed foreign ownership of subsoil resources, spurring a large increase in United States and European investment in Mexican mines.

The rural population was mostly impacted by the cost of modernization. The government seized private and communal lands, which only increased the landless population and led to further concentration of land ownership. Foreign investors took advantage of Diaz's policy making and by 1888 land companies had obtained possession of more than 27.5 million hectares of rural land. By 1894 these companies controlled one-fifth of Mexico's total territory. By 1910 most villages had lost their communal land holdings, a few hundred wealthy families held some 54.3 million hectares of the country's most productive land. Mexico's economic success during the Porfiriato had negative social consequences. Although the economy grew at an average annual rate of 2.6 %, by 1900 unemployment increased as mechanization displaced artisans faster than unskilled workers were absorbed into new productive enterprises. Food production for the domestic consumption decreased, which increased the number of those living in hunger.<sup>4</sup> Wages were miserable which led to the development of urban slums and unhealthy living conditions.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Brown, Jonathan C. Foreign and native-born workers in Porfirian Mexico. *American Historical Review*, Jun93, Vol. 98 Issue 3, p786, 33p, 5bw.

<sup>5</sup> Turner, John K. Barbarous Mexico University of Texas Press, Austin and London, p96.

The prosperity of Mexico's peace and well-being were only enjoyed by a few. For the vast majority of the advancements, most brought no improvements to their majority of population's daily lives. The majority of the wealth flowed into in urban areas only. This led to the growth of a middle class of white-collar workers, artisans, and entrepreneurs. The middle class identified strongly with the European manners and tastes adopted by the urban upper class, which had a great negative impact of the culture and tradition. The identification of the urban middle class with the European values promoted by Díaz further aggravated the schism between urban and rural Mexico. Thanks to Díaz, the lines were more clearly defined that divided the rich and poor. At one moment he even banned the poor from the cities so that the foreigners would not see them. Despite the modernization, Mexico remained a predominantly poor and rural country, and class stratification became entrenched.

This only led to the discontent of the people growing quickly, in the last decade of his rule. Díaz had a couple of methods of dealing with unrest the first and most institutionalized one was the church. Who came to support the regime, only after convincing Díaz to allow the anticlerical reformat laws to fall into disuse. These allowed wealth to travel back into the hand of the church. In return the church turned the cheek and did there part suppressing the peasantry.<sup>6</sup> This method alone was not good enough so Díaz found it necessary to establish a unique group within the government's state

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<sup>6</sup> Weiner, Richard. Trinidad Sanchez Santos: Voice of the Catholic Opposition in Porfirian Mexico. *Mexican Studies*, Summer2001, Vol. 17 Issue 2, p321, 29p.



police. This group was ruthless in dealing with any resistance against the Porfirio's regime and ultimately effective. Conspirators were crushed, and banditry was officially eliminated thugs who were known as the "*Rurales*." The modernization program was also brought about at the expense of personal and political freedom and freedom of the press was nonexistent.<sup>7</sup> Díaz made certain that "order" was maintained at all costs for the sake of "progress." Force was used whenever necessary to neutralize opponents of the regime. The army and the rurales became the forces of repression for the maintenance of the Porfirian peace during the Porfiriato. They were also in charge of rounding up, transporting, and selling, guarding and hunting slaves, known as *Enganchados*, who were force to work on haciendas.<sup>8</sup>

Like many dictators before him and after, was not scared to use crooked politics, violence, and intimidation as tactics to ensure his supremacy and to implement his program of modernization; and even though some outcomes of his rule were positive, the majority had negative impacts on society as a whole during the time of the Porfiriato. In 1909, Díaz declared his intention to restore democratic rule, yet his fraudulent re-election the following year demonstrated his promises empty, and sparked a revolution headed by Francisco I. Madero. In 1911, Díaz was forced to flee the country; he died in exile.

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<sup>7</sup> Turner, John K. Barbarous Mexico University of Texas Press, Austin and London p116.

<sup>8</sup> Turner, John K. Barbarous Mexico University of Texas Press, Austin and London. p91.

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